

Is My Child's Appetite Normal?

Cayla, who is four years old, didn't finish her lunch. But she is ready to play. Her mom quietly removes the plate and fixes a snack for later. That's okay!

Your child's appetite changes.

Children don't grow as fast in their preschool years. That's why your child may have a smaller appetite now. That's normal. If he or she isn't hungry or doesn't finish a meal, relax. Take the food away.

Your child probably is eating enough if he or she is full of energy and is growing and seems healthy. If your child is losing weight or has special food needs, get help from a health professional. This isn't the time to figure out the problem by yourself.

Most young children do best when fed four to six mini-meals a day.

Your child knows how much to eat.

Your child probably will eat the right amount if you don't force him or her. Healthy kids usually eat when they are hungry. And they stop when they feel full.

- **You decide** what foods to offer and plan regular times to eat. Perhaps suggest two kinds of fruit for snacks.
- **Let your child pick** from foods you offer **and decide** how much to eat. Giving your child that right and respect is important, even if he or she is plump.

Learning hunger cues is important.

Keep eating times relaxed so your child learns body signals for being hungry and feeling full. That's how your child can learn to eat in a normal way, not overeat. That's a good habit for lifelong health.



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Overfeeding can be a different problem.

Overfeeding and withholding food may end up in weight gain. Surprised? It's obvious that eating too much can make people fat. But underfeeding can have the same result. Your child might overeat later when there's another chance to eat.

The same thing can happen to grownups. For example, skipping breakfast can lead to overeating at lunch. It's okay for you to leave food on the plate, too, or to start with a smaller portion. You can do it!

More kids are developing diabetes at an early age and are overweight. You don't want that to happen. Deal with it now. Help your child learn to eat normally to keep a healthy weight as he or she grows.

Your child is watching you.

If you overeat, your child may, too – if not now, then later. Your child learns how to eat by watching you.

Keep your own portions sensible. Start with a small portion; only eat more if you're hungry. Eat when you're hungry, not just bored or stressed. Slow down to eat the right amounts.

When you take care of yourself, you take care of your child, too!

You Can Help Your Child Eat the Right Amount

- Offer small portions. Let the child ask for more.
- Allow enough time. This may give your child a chance to feel full.
- Take food away when your child stops eating.
- Avoid extremes of withholding food when your child is hungry. Offer a small snack.

